

Owego priest was removed in 1985 for sex misconduct

Case too old for criminal charges

By TODD McADAM
Press & Sun-Bulletin

OWEGO — The rumors regarding the priest lingered in Owego for 17 years. The Diocese of Rochester declared them fact this week: The Rev. Albert H. Cason was removed from his ministry for sexual misconduct.

The apparent victims were

children, said Tioga County sheriff's investigators who were involved with the case in 1985.

No charges were filed against the former co-pastor of Owego's St. Patrick's Church. Nor can they be; the criminal statute of limitations has expired. But the incidents — or incident, according to the diocese — doomed

Cason's career as a priest.

"Even after a period of treatment, Cason was never permitted to return to ministry of any kind," the Rev. Joseph A. Hart, vicar general of the Rochester Diocese, wrote in an e-mail to the *Press & Sun-Bulletin*. "He has worked for the past 17 years in secular employment."

A Rochester woman who identified herself as Cason's stepmother said Cason lives

in Seneca County, in the Finger Lakes region. An Albert Cason who answered a phone call in Lodi denied he is the former priest.

That the diocese, which oversees Roman Catholic churches in Tioga County, has publicized Cason's story contrasts with the Syracuse Diocese, which oversees churches in Broome and Chenango counties. The Syracuse Diocese will reveal neither the

number of priests who sexually abused children, nor their names.

Syracuse Diocese spokeswoman Danielle Cummings has said the diocese policy will change slightly in a revision to be announced either late this week or early next week when Bishop James Moynihan reviews it. But don't expect those details to be revealed.

The Most Rev. Matthew

Clark, bishop of the Rochester Diocese, has not revealed the numbers of allegations or the numbers of priests involved with child sex abuse before 1993 — when the diocese adopted its policy governing priests and child abuse. But there was that name Hart released — Cason, a man who had been co-pastor for 12 years.

SEE PRIEST 8A

Priest —

CONTINUED FROM 1A

"While the policies and practices in place 17 years ago were quite different, the result was exactly the same. A complaint against Albert Cason was received, investigated and found credible," Hart wrote in an e-mail. "He was removed from ministry in June 1985 and sent for treatment. At no time subsequently was he allowed to return to ministry. Concurrently, the concerns of the victim were addressed."

The victims would now be in their 30s or 40s, Tioga County Sheriff's Investigator Lenny Jackson said. Police were not involved with the investigation until years after some of the incidents, Jackson said. He was a road-patrol deputy in 1985 when he was assigned to help investigators because he was also a parishioner at St. Patrick's.

"None of the parishioners wanted to press charges," he said. "It was a pretty embarrassing time for our parish. He was a very nice man. You wouldn't expect this of him."

Lead Investigator Ronald Tracy has retired, and Senior Investigator Gary Howard concedes he's a bit fuzzy on the details after a decade and a half. Howard said he believes the victims were in their

teens when the incidents occurred, and that Cason was removed from the parish, but that's about all.

"I never knew where he went, nor do I care," he said.

But parishioners care. Some don't want to comment publicly; others are guarded. Several said they knew of the rumors years ago.

"There was an inkling, but I have no details," said parishioner William Franz, the village's former mayor. "I don't know all the details. I tend to give him the benefit of the doubt."

He and parishioner Mary Jane Doty recall Cason as an outgoing, well-liked man who visited sick people in the hospital and worked to counsel couples.

"It's amazing how he helped so many couples," Doty said. "He was very good to people."

Police privately confirmed the rumors to some parishioners, Doty said. But some parishioners still wanted to like Cason.

"Al the priest was a wonderful man," Doty said. "Al the man was a sick man."

She immediately forgave him and hopes others do the same. She's only talking about Cason now because she wants the controversy surrounding him — and surrounding the Roman Catholic Church — to subside.

"There has to be healing," she said.



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